

There was a horrible earthquake which destroyed the city of Massena in eastern Sicily. It was Europe's worst earthquake. 70,000 people in Messina died.

40 miles from Messina the federal prison in Noto, Sicily was destroyed but everyone survived. Let me now go back in time to 1902. The story involves 2 people Maria and Alessandro.

Although maria Goretti and AlessandroSaranelli came form two different families, their families lived together in the same house because they were very poor.

Alessandro was addicted to pornography. Although Maria was only 11, Alessandro was infatuated with her. On July 5, 1902 Alessandro attacked Maria. He tried to rape her but she resisted and so he stabbed her 14 times. She lived for 24 hours after the attack. Amazingly she told Alessandro over and over again "I forgive you, I forgive you, I forgive you." Then she died.

3 months later Alessandro went to trial. Before he sentenced him the judge said to those present in the courtroom; "Does anyone have anything to say?"

Maria's mother answered. She said, "Your honor I forgive Alessandra." Well the people in the courtroom were furious and shouted out in anger. Assunta, Maria's mother turned to the crowd, staring at them and said, "And suppose Jesus Christ does not forgive you."

Now back to Noto the Federal prison and Alessandro. Following the horrible earthquake, Alessandro had a vivid and intense dream. A beautiful girl dressed in pure white appeared to him. Of course, it was Maria. She was holding 14 lilies in her hands, one for every wound she had received. As she handed the lilies to Alessandra they were like flaming lights. She said to him "Alessandro as I promised, your soul shall someday reach me in heaven."

Prior to his dream Alessandro was like a caged animal in jail. The dream broke his heart wide open. His conversion was immediate. He was released 3 years short of his sentence because he became an exemplary inmate.

Maria's mother welcomed Alessandro into her home. Eventually this murderer, this horrible man became a Franciscan lay brother, living a life of littleness, humility, and prayer.

He was present at the Vatican for the canonization of St. Maria Goretti as was Assunta, Maria's mother.

Maria Goretti never looked back.

God give us courage!